

Intersecting heritage, milieu and environment

The concept of Nordic museology in the early 1990s

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Abstract: *In this study, I investigate the concept of Nordic museology in the early 1990s. Per-Uno Ågren's programmatic article about museology and cultural heritage, published in 1993 in the first ever issue of the journal Nordic Museology, is the point of departure for my historiographic investigation. Ågren's article is firstly contextualized within the international museological discourse of the 1980s and early 1990s, secondly within a late twentieth-century idea milieu in Umeå where curators and researchers received, revised, shaped and used a variety of concepts and practices. The key concepts include traditional museology, new museology, museum studies and heritology as well as idea milieu and life milieu, total heritage, environmental heritage, idea heritage, cultural heritage and natural heritage. What were the specifics of Ågren's concepts of museology and cultural heritage in relation to the adjacent concepts in the international museological discourse and the idea milieu in Umeå? How did Ågren and his colleagues formulate the concept of Nordic museology?*

Keywords: Museologies, museum studies and heritology, cultural heritage and natural heritage, environmental heritage and idea heritage, idea milieu and life milieu, environmental heritage and environmental history, cultural ecology and human ecology.

The first issue of the journal *Nordic Museology* was released in 1993. Originators of the journal were the curators and researchers John Aage Gjestrum, at the time museologist and former director of the Toten Ecomuseum in Norway, Ole Strandgaard, head of Museumshøjskolen in Denmark, and Per-Uno Ågren, head of the Department of Museology at the Umeå

University in Sweden and editor-in-chief for *Nordic Museology* 1993–2004. In their joint announcement, they made clear their extensive experience of museum practice and curatorial work, before addressing the purpose of the journal: to create a connection between museological studies, conducted at universities during the last decades, and

museum and conservation practice; to establish a Nordic forum for museological research and debate by publishing original research contributions as well as classical texts and reviews of new literature; to form an international forum by mediating museological texts written in languages not very extant in the Nordic countries, primarily French and German, and by mediating Nordic research to the international research community in and by means of English summaries of the articles (Ågren, Gjestrum & Strandgaard 1993:1f.).

Situated in the borderland of museological, historical and ecological discussions about theory and method, and university, museum and conservation practices in the Nordic countries, the journal's extensive purpose was to be maintained by a network of Nordic researchers and by using digital solutions. As the initiators Ågren, Gjestrum and Strandgaard instructed in their announcement, contributions to the journal should be sent in by using floppy disks – and by extension personal computers, word processors, digital cameras and image scanners – in order to facilitate the production of the journal. In so doing, they established a semi-digital medium right before the revolution in the latter half of the 1990s of e-mail, Internet and World Wide Web. The journal and node for research, mediation, debate and critique has later been described as “a continual virtual conference” (Silvén 2004:8).

The medium and its institutional organisation are certainly important when making content, and when trying to understand the content making (see Bäckström 2016). But how did the researchers and curators discuss and formulate the significant content in museology 25 years ago? With the purpose of investigating this question, I revisit the programmatic article “Museologi och kul-

turarv” (“Museology and cultural heritage”), written by Ågren and published in 1993 in the first ever issue of *Nordic Museology*. The two key concepts in the article's title point in the direction of a specific viewpoint in the late twentieth-century museological discourse with its complex formations and animated debates: a museological position in which the relation between museology and cultural heritage was of utmost importance, more so than between museology and museum collection.

In order to understand Ågren's programmatic article from 1993, it must be viewed in the light of the international museological discourse of the 1980s and early 1990s; chiefly the discussion within the ICOFOM (ICOM International Committee for Museology). “The committee can be considered the main platform for international museological discussion”, the museologist Peter van Mensch wrote in his PhD thesis *Towards a Methodology in Museology* (1992a: ch.3). I take this as my starting point when investigating texts by leading museologists in that context: van Mensch, Vиноš Sofka and Tomislav Šola. However, I also study texts by Gaynor Kavanagh, at the time researcher in museum studies at the University of Leicester in UK. Advocating museum studies in her contribution to the 1988 international symposium *What is Museology?* in Umeå, Kavanagh opposed certain meanings of the term “museology” and some of the work conducted in its name: “In essence, I *resist* the notion of museology as a separate science or distinct and coherent academic discipline. But I *embrace* the notion of museum studies as an intellectual field, the site of exploration and discovery” (1992:93). In a museum-studies anthology from 1991, edited by Kavanagh, Šola even stated that museology, as a scientific discipline, did not exist at all: “it is impossible to found a scientific, theoretical endeavour

on the basis of one sole institution”; instead, the mission should be to find and define the phenomenological area: “total heritage” with heritology as general theory (Šola 1991:133, see also 1992:17f.). Museology was thus critiqued by scholars in museum studies and heritology.

The idea milieu in Umeå during the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s is also pivotal when investigating Ågren’s programmatic article. In this idea milieu, curators and researchers investigated concepts and practices of heritage, milieu and environment from different perspectives. They were curators and museologists, like Ågren, Göran Carlsson and Erik Hofrén, and historians of ideas, like Ronny Ambjörnsson, Bosse Sundin and Sverker Sörlin. A testimony of the scholarly friendship in Umeå was given on the back cover of the museological and idea-historical anthology *Kunskapsarv och museum (Knowledge heritage and museum, 1997)*:

Within its field of interest, museology explores how views on history, natural environment and cultural heritage are created, preserved, conveyed and used in society. The book is a sample of topics within the field of contemporary museum science. The book is a result of the collaboration between the Department of Museology at the Umeå University and some of its closest scholarly friends in and outside of the university. Above all, the historians of ideas in Umeå have played a prominent role in the realisation of the book.¹

The anthology published papers from the 1995 and 1996 *Museidagar (Museum days)* in Umeå. Focusing on the theme “idea-historical perspectives on the museums”, eleven research fellows and doctoral students at the Department of History of Ideas presented papers at the 1995 *Museum days*; among them Sörlin and Sundin. The direct reason for this wide support

from the subject of History of Ideas was that it was a partner in the programme of Museology at the Umeå University (Lundberg 1997). Moreover, the research interests were similar at both departments. The same year, 1995, Sörlin and Sundin organized the conference *Miljön och det förflutna (The environment and the past)* at the Section of Environmental History at the Department of History of Ideas in Umeå. In the conference proceedings, they presented an outline for the historical study of environment and landscape as arenas for a variety of human activities and discourses: museum practice, cultural conservation, nature conservation, scientific research, industrial enterprise, tourism business, political debate, value attribution, etcetera (Sörlin & Sundin 1998).

Ågren, Gjestrum and Strandgaard, the originators of the journal *Nordic Museology*, claimed “that the concept of Nordic museology has a factual meaning”, that is, a common point of view on history and cultural memory (1993:1). This is an important background of my study, which purpose is to investigate the concept of Nordic museology in the early 1990s. How was it shaped at a late twentieth-century junction between viewpoints of a corresponding museum and conservation history in the Nordic countries, and discussions about and implementations of theories and methods in the international and local museological, ecological and idea-historical settings? My study is thus primarily a contribution to the historiography of museology (see Sofka 1976, 1992, 1995; Mensch 1992a; Ågren 1992b, 1995; Smeds 2000, 2007; Brenna 2009; Desvallées & Mairesse 2011; see also Bäckström 2016 about the partially overlapping field of museum research; cf. Andersson & Björck 1994 about the identity and historiography of the history of ideas).

30 THE MUSEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The reason for choosing the context of international museological discourse is threefold. Firstly, in his programmatic article, Ågren took ICOM as point of departure when putting forward the international scope of a more general concept of museology, that is, a concept that exceeded traditional expressions in European societies concerning the management of the material heritage (Ågren 1993:61). Secondly, since the mid-1970s, Ågren was an active contributor to international museological journals and anthologies in and around ICOM and ICOFOM (e.g. Ågren 1976, 1987, 1992ab, 1993, 1995, 2002; see also Raffin 2005). Thirdly, Ågren was for decades a notable organiser of international museological conferences, to which the aforesaid and other leading museologists contributed and participated, among them Thérèse Destrée-Heymans, André Desvallées, Saroj Ghose, Kenneth Hudson, Ulla Keding Olofsson, Alpha Oumar Konaré, Marc Maure, Hugues de Varinne and Kazimierz Żygulski.

Ågren was the host of *The Roles of the Museum in a Decentralized Cultural Policy*, the Annual Conference of CECA (ICOM's International Committee for Education and Cultural Action), which took place in 1976 at the Museum of Västerbotten in Umeå and several other places in the region (Ågren 1976; cf. Maure 2004). In 1988, he arranged the international symposium *What is Museology?* at the newly-founded Department of Museology at the Umeå University (Ågren 1992a). Alongside Ågren, museologists and museum-studies researchers like Gaynor Kavanagh, Peter van Mensch, Vinoš Sofka, Tomislav Šola and André Desvallées contributed with symposium papers. Ågren was also one of the

organisers of *Museum 2000. Confirmation or Challenge?*, a series of seminars in Härnösand, Lidköping, Norrköping, Uddevalla and Helsingborg as well as an international conference in Stockholm, arranged in 2000–01 as a co-operation between ICOM Sweden, the Swedish Travelling Exhibitions and the Swedish Museum Association (Ågren & Nyman 2002).

Founded in 1977, the main objective of ICOFOM during the 1970s and 1980s was to establish the science of museology in and by means of systematically organized long-term, mid-term and short-term study and disseminating activities: "ICOFOM's search for the foundations of museology" (Sofka 1992:39; cf. Mensch 1992a:ch.3). Breaking away from subject-matter disciplines, it was a scientific-theoretical ground work, aiming at building a scientific system (general, special and applied museology) and locating it in the system of sciences (an independent scientific discipline) (Sofka 1992:42). In the proceedings of the 1988 symposium in Umeå, Sofka, the chairman of ICOFOM 1982–89, elaborated on the activities in the early 1980s:

The aim was *firstly*, to elucidate objectively the character of museology, whether it was or not a science or just the practice of museum work, *secondly*, if museology is a science, to investigate how it fulfils the basic conditions for a science, and *thirdly*, assuming the science of museology as a fact, to find out what is or should be its theoretical contribution to the practical work in the field of heritage and what is the role of ICOFOM in this procedure (Sofka 1992:35).

Peter van Mensch outlined the history of ICOFOM in his PhD thesis from 1992: in the first period, 1977–83, the administrative and scientific structure took shape; in the second period, 1983–89, Sofka developed a *modus*

operandi based on three inter-connected symposia and extensive publishing (Mensch 1992a: ch.3; see also Sofka 1992:28, 1995:22). “At the end of the second period ICOFOM appeared to have succeeded in having acquired respectability as an international platform for theoretical discussion, while at the same time museology itself seems to have become recognized and accepted as an academic discipline” (Mensch 1992a: ch.3).

How about the principal notion of museum studies in the early 1990s Britain? In 1991, Gaynor Kavanagh edited two anthologies in museum studies, both arisen from the conference *Breaking New Ground* at the Department of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester. She also contributed with the paper “Current research in museum studies in Britain and future research needs” in the proceedings of the 1988 symposium in Umeå. As current lines of research in the interdisciplinary field of museum studies, Kavanagh put forward the thorough and critical exploration of “museum thinking and planning” (1991a:3). Kavanagh argued for critical studies of museums in society, both currently and historically, of museum practices and museum potentials, and of museums as products of distinct economic, political, cultural, historical and geographic conditions (1991abc, 1992, 1994; cf. Amundsen & Brenna 2010; Lund 2016). In Kavanagh’s opinion, museum-related research should not be carried out from the inside of the museum sector, neither as simple descriptive case studies nor as abstract discussions without relating theory to practice. Instead, it should be conducted from numerous outside vantage points:

My central argument is that the study of museums and the development of strong theoretical and methodological approaches must be addressed from

many different intellectual positions. Only then can it open our eyes and minds to the potentials of the museum; alert us to the sometimes deep flaws in curatorial practice and thinking; and equip us with secure framework from which museums can more readily meet the challenges of our times. Essentially, if this process of criticism, review and discussion, fundamental to the study of museums, is to be of value and worth then, to my mind, it has to be tackled intellectually from the *outside*. In sum, we have to learn more about the museum through harnessing the techniques, knowledge and critical tools of a variety of academic fields and intellectual traditions (Kavanagh 1992:93).

Thus, on the one hand, the museology of ICOFOM in the early 1990s: an independent scientific discipline, at a distance from established museal subject-matter disciplines, based on the continual research work of developing a general theory of science of museology in relation to humans, institutes, society, heritage and reality. On the other hand, the museum studies of the University of Leicester in the early 1990s: an interdisciplinary field of museum-related exploration, at the intersection of the university, museum and media sectors, based on a range of established theoretical positions and academic fields, such as sociology, semiotics, psychology, gender studies and cultural studies.

OBJECTS OF KNOWLEDGE

In the anthologies from 1991 and in her paper from the 1988 symposium in Umeå, Kavanagh presented museum theory and museum practice, at present and in history, as the knowledge objects of current museum studies in Britain, for example museum communication, museum visiting and museum collecting as well as museum profession, museum tradition,

32 museum culture, museum marketing and the place of theory in museum activities (Kavanagh 1991a:3, 1991c:8, 1992:95ff.). Conversely, in his PhD thesis from 1992 and in his paper from the 1988 symposium in Umeå, van Mensch presented a typology of museological objects of knowledge, first discussed at the ICOFOM Museology Workshop in 1986 (Mensch 1992a: ch.4, 1992b:80; see also Sofka 1992:41; cf. Kavanagh 1994:1f.). The typology consisted of three different approaches: the object-oriented museologies, the function-oriented museologies and the museum-oriented museologies. In the first approach, van Mensch clarified (1992a: ch.4), heritage was the most fundamental parameter, many times delimited to museum objects, but sometimes expanded to the total heritage of archives, libraries, museums and so forth. In the second approach, functions were seen by museologists as representing some basic tendencies in societies, which were more direct than institutional manifestations. In the third approach, the science of the museum institute was in focus, that is, the museum in history and at present, its role in society, its relationship with the physical environment and its activities and organisation.

Kavanagh's descriptions of British museum studies around 1990 included all three approaches, however delimited to the museum as thinking and doing. Since Ågren, in his programmatic article, distanced his view on Nordic museology from the third approach, more precisely from the "specific museum science" developed in Britain, France and Germany (1993:61), the first and second museological approach are most relevant when investigating his viewpoint. Concerning the second approach, van Mensch wrote: "The function-oriented approach in museology balances between two levels of abstraction. At

the one hand there is a group of authors that consider museology to be the study of a certain set of activities within the context of the museum institute, at the other hand there is a group of authors that studies these activities on a higher abstraction level as expressions of a specific relationship between man and reality" (1992a: ch.4).

While the well-known Swedish museum mantra *samlar, värda, visa* (collect, care, show) can exemplify the views of the former group, Ågren obviously belonged to the latter group of authors within the function-oriented museology. However, Ågren had liaisons also to the type of object-oriented museology which concerned itself with heritage as a broad phenomenon (not only museum collection), for example Šola and his position, expressed in the report from the 1988 symposium in Umeå, that the phenomenon of total heritage was the only obvious object of knowledge: "The shift from institution to phenomenon is the major change in rethinking the concept of museology" (Šola 1992:17). Whereas Šola established "total heritage" (both cultural and natural heritage) as the knowledge object of museology, primarily in and by means of theoretical studies, Ågren launched his "environmental heritage" (both cultural and natural heritage) after presenting his view of the corresponding history of the museums and conservation agencies in the Nordic countries (Ågren 1992b, 1993, 1995). Defining the concept of environmental heritage as the selection historically and currently of objects considered worthy of being protected and preserved by institutions of cultural conservation, nature conservation and museums (thus including both the cultural and natural legacy), Ågren elaborated on the museological object of knowledge: "Museology studies the apprehension of nature and the view of culture and history projected

by that legacy: the relationship of man to his surroundings as life environment and history. What in material reality has been imbued with so much meaning that it has been selected as an environmental heritage, protected by society in various particular ways?" (Ågren 1992b:111; cf. Sörlin & Sundin 1998)

The museological focal point was the broad material-heritage object, which Ågren justified by means of the corresponding museum and conservation history in the Nordic countries. However, according to Ågren, museology also focused on the wide array of functions, for example the selection, the preservation and the mediating of environmental heritage; his position was thus similar to the definition stated by van Mensch and his colleagues in 1983: museology defined as "the whole complex of theory and practice involving the caring for and the using of the cultural and natural heritage" (Mensch, Pouw & Schouten 1983 in Mensch 1992a: ch.4). To Ågren the museological study of the environmental heritage and the many functions and activities had three main perspectives: historical (for instance the definition as well as the selection and collection of environmental heritage in history and at present), sociological (the structures and rules in heritage institutions and activities, their societal significance, and so forth), and communicative (the mediation of the environmental heritage in exhibitions, the institutional working process from documentation to information, etcetera) (Ågren 1992b:112, 1993:63).

METHODOLOGIES

Peter van Mensch also discussed different methodologies of museology. In the article "Towards a methodology of museology", he presented four approaches concerning the basic

parameters for museological consideration (Mensch 1994:59ff, see also 1992a: ch.11). He started by describing the traditional museology, in which three basic parameters were given: collection, museum (as an institute and/or building) and public. This kind of museology had an object-oriented methodology, going from the inside to the outside, from collection to public. In opposition with traditional museology was the new museology of the 1970s with its basic parameters. "They are: heritage (instead of collection), territory (instead of institute and building) and population (instead of public)" (Mensch 1994:59). According to him, the new-museology approach focused on community-oriented methodology, going from outside to inside, from population to heritage. He also described the basic parameters of the ICOFOM long-term programme, which had been developed under Sofka's chairmanship, as a compromise between the traditional and new museology: cultural and natural heritage, museum institute, and society. "Society produces and uses its heritage; the museum institute fulfils an intermediary role" (Mensch 1994:60).

The so-called ICOFOM Alt Schwerin model of 1986 was the final model presented by van Mensch. It was a model based on the inter-relationship of four basic parameters for museological consideration. With heritage in the centre of the 1986 model, van Mensch remarked that it had some similarities to the model presented by Šola (heritology and the heritage institutions of Šola are discussed shortly). Visualizing his museological model and elaborating it in dialogue with Šola, the museologist Stephen Weil and the archaeologist James Deetz, van Mensch likened museology and its basic parameters to a globe with four spheres. The innermost first sphere referred to the "object" or "heritage" (cultural and

34 natural heritage, things as well as concepts and relationships; “object of action”), the second sphere stood for the “functions” (preservation, research and communication as basic functions of the museum; “pattern of action”), the third sphere related to the “institutional form” (heritage institutions, such as archive, library and museum; “form of action”), and the fourth sphere concerned “society as a whole” (the general socio-cultural context; “purpose of action”). As regards to the outermost societal sphere, van Mensch stated that all “these institutes can, in view of their objectives, be seen as social-cultural organizations. They serve the interests of social development” (Mensch 1994:60, see also 1992a: ch.11).

Van Mensch concluded by observing that museological theory and practice strive to systematize the combination of object value (the first sphere) and human value (the fourth sphere). He also made clear that museological theory and museum practice focus on the combination of the second and third sphere, whereas the first sphere belongs to the subject matters – for example archaeology, art history and ethnology – and the fourth sphere to the social sciences; museology only focuses on certain aspects of the first and the fourth sphere (Mensch 1994:61).

KEY CONCEPTS

There are important similarities between the basic parameters in these four models and the key concepts in Ågren’s articles in the first issue of *Nordic Museology* and in the proceedings of the 1988 symposium in Umeå. For instance, Ågren’s view on museology in these articles had much in common with the ICOFOM long-term programme, with its emphasis on the social production and usage of heritage and the intermediary role of the museum. Ågren wrote:

“Museology, it is argued, should study how, in different cultures and societies, people select and treat their material heritage, the moveable property as well the physical environment, and what type of institutions and structures are established to manage the preservation, care and communication of the historical heritage” (1993:65). In relation to the second basic parameter for museological consideration, “the institution”, Ågren described that conservators and curators operate as mediators in the border area between different public spheres, “the immaterial public sphere of science and public debate, and the material public sphere of the physical reality” (Ågren 1993:62). The main difference between the ICOFOM long-term model and the Ågren model for Nordic museology can be found in the broad institutional surroundings of the latter: Nordic museology concerned itself with museums as well as with cultural and nature preservation institutions.

Regarding the first basic parameter, “the object”, Ågren’s view was similar to both ICOFOM models (with heritage, not collection, in the centre) and the new-museology model with its community-oriented methodology (going from outside to inside, from population to heritage). This viewpoint was well-established in Umeå. Describing in 1982 the new museum exhibitions, which presented the cultural history of the region Västerbotten, Ågren and the designer Göran Carlsson placed the cultural-historical phenomena and narrative in the centre, and decentred the museum collection: “The objects in the museum collections should not govern the content of the exhibition. If there were no objects that could represent the phenomena being treated, the collections had to be supplemented by acquisitions, loans, maybe replicas of items”, (Ågren & Carlsson 1982:73) Furthermore, in

his article from 1993, Ågren stated that since natural heritage is selected culturally, he had comprised it in his concept of cultural heritage. So he gave the “cultural heritage” in the article’s title the same broad meaning as “heritage” in both ICOFOM definitions.

Ågren also described “museum object” as a synonym of “cultural heritage”, hence the result of musealisation processes, that is, the constituent processes of objects and functions, which according to him were the knowledge object of museology. In Ågren’s point of view, the concept of museum object comprised for example museum collections (*museisamlingar*), natural monuments (*naturminnen*), ancient monuments (*fornlämningar*) and listed buildings (*byggnadsminnen*): the material objects of the museum sector and the cultural and nature conservation sectors. The relation of museum object and cultural heritage was similar to the opinion discussed by Šola at the 1988 symposium in Umeå: “a museum object is any piece of information processed in museums or kindred institutions, or heritage-related activities, used in the transfer of experience” (Šola 1992:18). Recognizing the immaterial and material side of cultural heritage, Ågren however distinguished the material side as the knowledge object of museology: “In short, the material cultural heritage as societal phenomena is the field of museology” (Ågren 1993:62, see also 1992b:111). Despite the material delimitation, Ågren’s museology was a broad concept, encompassing the theorizing and investigation of both museum and conservation practices within a societal framework. It was however not as broad as Šola’s concept of heritology.

HERITOLOGY

The term “heritology” was coined by Tomislav Šola in 1982. To him heritology was the general

theory of global heritage for an integrated heritage profession, and total heritage the phenomenological ground that encompassed all heritage institutions (Šola 1991, 1992, 1997; cf. Mensch 1992a: ch.4). Indeed, in the proceedings from the 1988 symposium in Umeå, Šola stated that the phenomenon of total heritage was the only obvious object of knowledge. He explained (1992:12–17) that heritology went beyond the institution-centred traditional museology, trying to be rationalist and positivistic, which had been tailored to the needs of the object-centred museums of the second wave. Heritology was also organisationally wider than the community-centred new museology with the eco museums of the third wave, which, in Šola’s words, participated in the search for solutions on the trouble of our world:

The “new museology” has been in existence for less than two decades. The new era that brought eco-museums into existence coincided with another process: museum people started to look around their institutions with new awareness toward the world outside. What they saw, those who were able to look, were needs that called for a new engagement on behalf of museums; but they also saw that many others were doing the same job. The latter is very important. There are archives, libraries, natural parks, audio-visual archives, data banks, private collections, restoration and conservation institutes; there are institutions for the protection of cultural heritage and those specializing the natural heritage. There are also schools and universities with accumulations of diverse experiences (Šola 1992:15).

In the first of the two anthologies edited by Gaynor Kavanagh in 1991, Šola presented a Linnaean-inspired taxonomy, thus ordering the work places of the new, amalgamated heritage profession: “species – heritage care unit; variety

– museum, library, archive” (Šola 1991:132). The heritage care unit, Šola explained, should serve as an extension to the senses of human beings, as an amplifier to the capacity of human beings of comprehension and sensibility, and as a tool for wise and harmonious developments. The overall purpose of the heritage care unit and heritology? To create wisdom.

THE IDEA-MILIEU CONTEXT

In order to understand Ågren’s programmatic article from 1993 in the first issue of *Nordic Museology*, I also contextualise it with an idea milieu in Umeå that incorporated parts of the Umeå University and parts of the Museum of Västerbotten; the concept of idea milieu (*idémiljö*) used here is lent from Ronny Ambjörnsson (see below). During the last three decades of the twentieth century, the aforesaid environs in Umeå can be described as an idea milieu of curatorial, museological and idea-historical thinking and doing. In this idea milieu, researchers and curators used and developed several innovative concepts and practices, such as the concept of heritage with its mouldable qualities, the popular idea milieus studied by way of idea-historical field research, the environmental history with its interdisciplinary and synthesizing traits, the cultural history investigated from a cultural-ecological perspective, and the basis exhibition with its changeable permanence.

I argue that this idea milieu in Umeå had a three-sided centre, or, in other words, that the academic and curatorial practices focused on three general objects of knowledge. The first object of knowledge, “heritage”, had two dimensions: the material “environmental heritage” (the area of museology and curatorial practice) and the immaterial “idea heritage” (history of ideas). The second object of

knowledge, “milieu”, had also two dimensions: the living life and livelihood in the “life milieu” (ethnology) and the envisioned life in the “idea milieu” (history of ideas of the people). Finally, the third object of knowledge, “environment”, had dual dimensions too: the three-layered “environmental history” (natural sciences, anthropology and social history, and history of ideas) and the material “environmental heritage” (museology and curatorial practice).

HERITAGES

First documented in 1887, the Swedish word *kulturarv* (cultural heritage) has a rather long history with many layers of meaning, which become apparent when investigating the collection of language samples at the Editorial Office of the Swedish Academy Dictionary in Lund (see Bäckström 2012). Focusing, in this brief historical overview, on the common, however contested, meanings in the heritage sector of recent decades, the first documented use of the word in this context was in 1928. Nils Lithberg, archaeologist and ethnologist, described the collections of prehistoric objects from the Swedish island Gotland in the British Museum, and how he wanted “to return, in descriptions and images, the cultural heritage that earlier had been squandered” (1928:206).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the conservation sector in Sweden began to use the word more frequently, chiefly in Swedish but also in English. In the *ICOMOS Bulletin* in 1981, for example, the Swedish National Committee of the International Council for Monuments and Sites published *The Cultural Heritage in Sweden*, in which the national antiquary Roland Pålsson wrote: “The national cultural policy states that the cultural heritage is to be preserved and vivified” (1981:8). In 1985, Sweden ratified UNESCO’s *Convention*

Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. But it was not until the 1990s that the discourse about “cultural heritage”, a concept with open-ended meanings, more generally began to influence the Swedish conservation and museum practices (see Richard Pettersson (2003), historian of ideas and museologist at the Umeå University, for a comprehensive study of the concept of cultural heritage in relation to the cultural-conservation sector in Sweden).

When, in 2005, the journal *Västerbotten* published the special issue “Uppdrag kulturarv – texter om Per-Uno Ågren” (“Mission cultural heritage – texts about Per-Uno Ågren”), the open-ended concept of cultural heritage was somewhat new in the Swedish museum and conservation practices, yet long established in the international museological discourse, in which Ågren participated. In this special issue, the historian of ideas Ronny Ambjörnsson wrote about a very productive milieu in Umeå during the 1970s and 1980s. It was in this idea milieu Ambjörnsson was introduced to a new idea: “It was an idea or rather a viewpoint that Per-Uno put forward in a more private setting. It may simply be described as follows: our cultural heritage does not only comprise of objects and environments, it also comprises of thoughts and conceptions” (Ambjörnsson 2005:66).

Taking Ambjörnsson’s article “Om idé-historisk fältforskning” (“On idea-historical field research”, 2005) as point of departure, it is feasible to distinguish Ågren’s viewpoint on cultural heritage in the joint announcement and in his programmatic article, both published in 1993 in the first issue of *Nordic Museology*. In fact, this first issue presented specific terms that may be used when differentiating between the material and the immaterial dimensions of cultural heritage: “environmental heritage” (*miljöarv*) and “idea

heritage” (*idéarv*). This is the same distinction, however using different terms, which Ågren and Ambjörnsson had been discussing in the 1970s and early 1980s.

In the first issue of *Nordic Museology*, environmental heritage was defined as the physical and material environment, idea heritage as the foundation, moulded in society, of the views on history and cultural memories. In the proceedings from the 1988 symposium in Umeå, Ågren gave a broad definition of environmental heritage: “A selection of objects deemed worthy of being protected and preserved by the agents of cultural preservation, nature preservation and museums becomes our lasting ‘environmental heritage’, a term which may include both our cultural and our natural legacy. The concept is social and is value-based” (Ågren 1992b:111; cf. Kavanagh 1994:3).

When reading Ågren’s articles about museology and heritage and Ambjörnsson’s article about the idea-historical field research, the first thought that comes into mind is that the specific concepts of environmental heritage and idea heritage were focal points of museology and history of ideas, respectively, whereas the concept of cultural heritage (incorporating natural and cultural heritage) was a general concept encompassing both research fields. This explanation is however overly simple. In Umeå, both research fields also focused on the relations to the object of knowledge of the other field: museology on the relations between the visible world and conceptual history, the history of ideas on the relations between world views and cultural landscapes. On the one hand, the museologist Ågren wrote: “That means that museology is especially interested in the relationship between that which is the visible world and history. The environment with its components

of nature and culture is the material, concrete, physical. History is the immaterial, abstract, conceptual” (1992b:111). On the other hand, the historian of ideas Bosse Sundin reflected on “the past as ideal, the past as heritage, the past as environment, the past as source for social and cultural mobilisation, the past as livelihood, the past as commercial product” in his paper from the 1995 *Museum days* in Umeå (1997:14).

Already in 1970, Gunnar Eriksson, professor at the newly-founded Section of History of Ideas at the Umeå University, had addressed this type of interplay. In his subject description for the autumn term, Eriksson emphasized that the notion of the interplay between ideas and the environment (and so forth) indicated a reorientation of the subject of History of Ideas: “As well as all other human creations, ideas depend on the environment, on class and group interests, on national values and economic realities. To the same extent, however, human society, its technology and its power structure are products of these ideas” (Eriksson 1970 in Pitkä-Kangas 1995:43). The notion of the fundamental interplay between the material and the immaterial was thus established in Umeå when Ågren and Sundin wrote their articles.

MILIEUS

Ronny Ambjörnsson focused on the history of the subject and its organisation in Umeå in his article “Idéhistoriska institutionen under 1980-talet – en snabbskiss” (“The Department of History of Ideas in the 1980s – a quick sketch”, 1995). In this article, he remarked that the ambition of the research project *Norrlands bildningshistoria* (*The history of Bildung in North Sweden*), led by him in the early 1980s, was to go beyond the traditional idea-historical

research areas in order to find learning and *Bildung* in ordinary milieus. The approach was to conduct studies about popular idea milieus, thus to create the history of ideas of the people (*folkets idéhistoria*). Ambjörnsson wrote: “This became to a certain degree the profile of the department in the early 80s” (1995:47).

This relatively distinct profile, I argue, was one of the specific idea-historical elements within the idea milieu in Umeå, which primarily encompassed parts of the Umeå University and parts of the Museum of Västerbotten.

In his recounts about his friendship and professional collaboration with Ågren during the 1970s and 1980s, Ambjörnsson (2005) put forward the fact that it was Ågren who had suggested him to conduct field research into the idea-historical dimension of the region’s cultural heritage. Ambjörnsson addressed this topic in 1982 in his inauguration lecture as professor in the history of ideas at the Umeå University. Relating to Philippe Ariès, Jacques Le Goff, Peter Burke and Carlo Ginzburg, that is the leading scholars of the *Annales* School, the history of mentalities, and microhistory, Ambjörnsson described the specific idea-historical research method:

We will try to supplement this survey, which I mentioned before [studying what function the great ideas have at grassroots level], by interviewing people who are still alive about their memories from the 1920s and 1930s. It may be feasible, by combining archive research and oral interviews, to reconstruct the idea milieu itself, the specific space in which ideas are received, transformed and become part of a life (Ambjörnsson 1983:163, see also 1988:20f, 1995:47).

Ambjörnsson’s inauguration lecture may be considered an outline for the history of ideas of the people and its field-research method to

reconstruct popular idea milieus. This outline was implemented in the aforesaid research project about popular idea milieus in the northern parts of Sweden. And at the second international symposium at the Department of Museology in Umeå in 1989, Ambjörnsson presented research results from the project (1992).

In 2005, when looking back at this research project, Ambjörnsson pondered on the specific task for the historian of ideas: "It was not to reconstruct a culture, but to reconstruct the ideals that supported this culture. The task of the historian of ideas was not to describe the, so to speak, *living* life, it was the area of the ethnologist, but the *envisioned* life" (2005:67). Ambjörnsson made a distinction between the ethnological area of life milieu with its everyday life and livelihood and the idea-historical area of idea milieu with its envisioned life, woven of various ideals, views, norms and ideas. In the text published in 1995, in connection with the department's 25th anniversary, Ambjörnsson clarified some key characteristics of the idea-historical research milieu in Umeå:

One might say that since the beginning of the 80s, the distinguishing trait of the department has been our efforts to expand the concept of intellectual. We have sought to identify intellectuals also in milieus where one does not traditionally expect to find them, not only in the "big" popular movements but also within movements, such as the local-heritage movement, the hygiene movement and the vegetarianism (Ambjörnsson 1995:47).

Ambjörnsson considered the more recent research work of Bosse Sundin and Sverker Sörlin, in which the concept of environment was deepened, as a natural development to the approach to locate and study different kinds of idea-historical milieus (1995:47).

ENVIRONMENTS

The importance of idea-historical studies of nature and views of nature had been expressed in 1981 in the anthology *Naturligtvis. Uppsatser om natur och samhälle tillägnade Gunnar Eriksson (Naturally. Essays on nature and society dedicated to Gunnar Eriksson)*. Published by the Department of History of Ideas at the Umeå University, research fellows and doctoral students, like Ambjörnsson, Sörlin and Sundin, discussed the many physical and ideological relations between humans and nature in and by means of examples in history.

In 1991, Sörlin described in his book *Naturkontraktet. Om naturumgängets idé-historia (The nature contract. On the history of ideas of the interaction with nature)* why he had decided to conduct research with an environmental-historical perspective: "I began to realise that the environmental movement was not only critical but also creative, community building. It seemed to me that to distinguish the idea-historical roots of such thinking was an important task" (Sörlin 1991:10). According to Sörlin, the human-ecological dimension had been incorporated in the writing of history during the last decades, thus inventing the environmental history. He also made the observation that an anthropological and regional orientation of academic research had been established internationally during the same period. Viewpoints from the environmental history, emerging in the 1970s, had been combined with the anthropological and geographic focus of the Annales School from the late 1920s and onwards (Sörlin 1991:22f, see 1985 about the ideas behind the human ecology established in Umeå in 1976; see also Sörlin & Sundin 1998 about the conference *The environment*

40 *and the past* in Umeå in 1995; cf. Sörlin 1994b; Ambjörnsson 1982, 1988).

Focusing on environmental history, Sörlin clarified that it was interdisciplinary, and that it had three analytical levels: the ecological level with nature itself (species, food chains and diseases but also changes in cultural landscapes); the socio-economic level with anthropological and socio-historical studies (conditions for reproduction, customs, culture and economic structures); the idea level with idea-historical studies (myth, religion, science, ethics and other ways of thinking about nature) (Sörlin 1991:24, see also 1994a:351f.). Sörlin implemented this point of view in his paper “Den museala naturen” (“The museal nature”) from the 1995 *Museum days* in Umeå, where he discussed the mental musealisation of nature and the prevalence of museal nature: “Perhaps the nature is completely permeated by human intent and meaning construction. In that case the museal project has finally triumphed” (Sörlin 1997:123). The term used by him to describe these museal constructs was “site heritage” (*platsarv*).

When analysing the texts by Ågren, Ambjörnsson, Sörlin and Sundin from the last decades of the twentieth century, it becomes clear that the idea milieu in Umeå may be described as a distinct and productive part of an international academic and curatorial current, which flowed through the fields of cultural ecology, environmental history, heritology, history of mentalities, human ecology, microhistory, museum studies and new museology. To give but a few examples: In 1991, Sörlin co-edited the double special issue “Tema museum” (“Theme museum”) of the journal *Tvärsnitt*, which presented an overview of research and reflexion on the museum as discourse, space, habit, bad habit and love for objects; the contributors included Annsofie

Becker, Billy Ehn, Anders Ekström, Gottfried Korff and Karen Wonders. The two co-editors Gunnar Broberg and Sörlin described the current musealisation as all-encompassing: “the museum has become an everyday product, the everyday has become museal. We live in a museum” (1991:12). In 1982, Ågren and Göran Carlsson stated that their view on the region’s cultural history was founded on a cultural-ecological perspective and that they had implemented it in the new basis exhibitions at the Museum of Västerbotten (1982:82ff.). In 1976, Ågren presented his opinion on museum displays in the journal *ICOM Education*: “The method of presentation must aim at an overall exposition of history as an environmental totality, where human efforts are seen against a background of nature and its resources” (1976:7).

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Per-Uno Ågren’s viewpoint on the museum and cultural heritage had much in common with the eco museum and the new museology of the 1970s, with their focus on heritage, territory and population (more than on museum collection, museum institution and museum visitors) (Mensch 1994; cf. Ågren 1994; Gjestrum & Maure 1988). Moreover, in comparison to Vиноš Sofka’s vision of museology as an individual scientific discipline, the interdisciplinary and environmental approach was apparent in museological practice in Umeå. Possibly closer to Ågren’s viewpoint was Gaynor Kavanagh’s notion of museum studies: not a separate academic discipline, but an interdisciplinary field of critical investigations at the intersection of university research, media reporting and museum thinking and planning; “the broad subject of museums and curatorial practice”, with many theoretical perspectives

and overlapping lines of research (1992:95). Advocating the necessity for interdisciplinary and critical studies from numerous vantage points, “museology is dependent on the results from many sciences” (1993:63), Ågren nevertheless distanced himself from the specific museum science in Britain, with its focus on the multifaceted museum. He made the wide-ranging “environmental heritage” the primary knowledge object of museology, however with a profound interest in “idea heritage” too.

The museological approach in Umeå, I argue, can be understood by Ågren’s view of a corresponding history of the museum and conservation practices in the Nordic countries, by his cultural-ecological perspective on cultural history, and by the presence in the idea milieu of the history of ideas of the people as well as the interdisciplinary human ecology and environmental history (Ågren 1976, 1993; Ambjörnsson 1983, 1988; Sörlin 1985, 1991). Ågren’s concepts of Nordic museology and environmental heritage from the 1980s and 1990s, and his use of the concept of cultural ecology in the Museum of Västerbotten in the 1970s and 1980s, testify to the key role that he gave to, on the one hand, museology as academic research on the historically-given processes of the making of natural and cultural value, and, on the other hand, the practices of nature protection, cultural care and museum work in the knowledge dissemination and societal planning. Ågren certainly dealt with the reflexive as well as the ecological, environmental and social dimensions of heritage production and heritage use in societies of yesterday and today.

While Ågren required that the conservation and museum institutions should address ecological and environmental issues, Tomislav Šola described the heritage institution as

a problem solver in present-day society. As shown, Kavanagh, Šola, Sofka and Peter van Mensch interacted with the idea milieu in Umeå, both by personal visits and in and by means of their publications. Since several concepts with similar meanings were used and discussed both in the idea milieu in Umeå and in the symposia, conferences and publications of ICOFOM and the Department of Museum Studies in Leicester, they may be regarded as statements of the dynamic inter-connections between these settings; other concepts demonstrate that the idea milieu in Umeå was a productive part of the discourses of cultural ecology, human ecology and environmental history.

The curators and researchers in Umeå received, revised, shaped and used a variety of concepts and practices, thus forming a semantic and practical milieu of academic and curatorial life. In connection with international communities, they problematized the categories of culture and nature and investigated the material and the immaterial as well as heritage, milieu and environment. Hence, the idea milieu in Umeå included a broad range of intersected concepts and practices, such as the concept of Nordic museology and the curatorial, museological and idea-historical practices, furthermore “cultural heritage” and “natural heritage”, “environmental heritage” and “idea heritage”, “idea milieu” and “life milieu”, “environmental heritage” and “environmental history”, “knowledge heritage” and “knowledge history”, “cultural ecology” and “human ecology”.

For me, as an historian of ideas interested in other places and other times as resources for reflexive and critical thinking here and now, the international museological discussions and the idea milieu in Umeå certainly have great value, for example when investigating and developing the more recent field of environmental humanities.

42 NOTES

1. Much of the source material for this study is written in Swedish and Norwegian (see Literature); all translations are mine.

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